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ABSTRACT

Adolescent girls living in Guatemala today experience a variety of influences on their lives. These include transmitted cultural values blended from Mayan and Spanish traditions, current social and economic conditions such as inflation, political violence, and urban migration, and also more immediate and personal influences: their families, friends, and teachers. This study examined how adolescent girls in urban Guatemala view their own lives and their futures, as depicted in their views of ideal women. Ninety adolescent girls were asked to complete the ideal woman questionnaire, and to draw a picture of the ideal woman doing something. The Guatemalan girls viewed womanhood in traditional terms. The ideal woman was depicted as a hard worker who takes care of her home and family. Her identity is based in her social network, and she derives her happiness and her satisfaction from participating in others' development. If the ideal woman works outside the home, she works in those occupations traditionally reserved for women: teacher, nurse, or secretary. Guatemalan girls recognized the value of women as homemakers and caretakers. The cultural value of collectivism in Guatemala, the traditional emphasis on the family, and the adoption of the feminine values of nurturance and caretaking all contribute to the Guatemalan adolescent girls' view of the ideal woman as hard working, nurturant, honest, and affectionate in her participation in her family and occupational roles. (LLL)

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Guatemalan girls' views of the ideal woman

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Adolescent girls living in urban Guatemala today experience a variety of influences on their lives. These include transmitted cultural values blended from Mayan and Spanish traditions, current social and economic conditions such as inflation, political violence, and urban migration, and also more immediate and personal influences- their families, friends, and teachers. The purpose of the present study was to find out how adolescent girls in urban Guatemala view their own lives and their futures, as depicted in their views of the ideal woman.

Traditional Guatemalan culture is distinct from other that of other Latin American countries. Among the indigenous Mayan population, there is strict role differentiation for men and women, with women wielding substantial economic power through their weaving and merchant roles (Maynard, 1974). Among the ladino population, with a greater Spanish influence, the cultural ideal has been described as machismo for men, self-sacrifice for women, and economic dependence of wives on their husbands. The blending of Mayan and Spanish cultures in Guatemala has led to a distinct set of cultural values. In a study of work values, Hofstede (1983) found Guatemalan employees of a multinational corporation to be the least individualistic of workers from 50 countries. Guatemalan workers endorsed a collectivist perspective, including a "we" consciousness, identity based in the social system, and a membership ideal.

Another social influence during the period of this study included an economic crisis, leading to nationwide teacher's strikes in 1989. The strike further reduced educational opportunities for a population of girls who had attended public schools, and who already had fewer educational opportunities than their male counterparts. Although education is compulsory in Guatemala through the sixth grade, fewer girls than boys attend school, particularly after they reach adolescence (Guatemalan Ministry of Education, 1987).

The more proximal influences on Guatemalan girls include their families and friends. Descriptions of the lives of Guatemalan girls emphasize their early socialization into female adult roles (Maynard, 1974; Rogoff, 1981). From the age of six or seven, they help their mothers with housework, and by adolescence often assume major responsibility for caring for younger siblings. As compared to boys of the same age, they are kept closer to home, and are almost always in the presence of an older female relative (Maynard, 1974).

The questions of the current investigation were: How do the girls experience their lives? What do they see as possibilities for their futures? How do they view women's roles in society?

Method

Data were collected from1986 through 1989 at public and private schools in Guatemala City and Antigua, Guatemala. Directors of schools and teachers were contacted, and asked to help if they thought the exercise would be educationally valuable for their students. In all, 90 adolescent girls, ranging in age from 11 to 16 years old completed the ideal woman questionnaire, adapted from Clifford, Grandgenett, and Bardwell (1981). Forty-seven of the girls rated the importance of ten characteristics of the ideal woman as described by Stiles et al. (1987). All 90 girls drew a picture of the ideal woman doing something. The drawings were scored according to Stiles et al. (1987). Representative drawings of the ideal woman cooking, holding babies, or teaching were interpreted by fourteen additional adolescent girls.

Results

The qualities that the girls rated as most important for the ideal woman were being kind and honest and liking children. Also important were being very

intelligent and having a good job. Seen as least important were being sexy and having a lot of money. (See Table 1.)

Most girls (62%) drew the ideal woman in a traditional female role, such as housekeeping or childcare. The most common drawing was of the ideal woman sweeping. (See Figure 1 for examples of girls' drawings.) Of those girls who didn't depict the ideal woman in a traditional feminine role, most drew her in a gender neutral role such as studying or eating.

Most drawings showed the ideal woman with adult responsibilities (59%), and also showed the ideal woman working (64%) rather than at leisure. The majority of the work depicted was housework such as cooking, cleaning, or childcare. The most common professional role was that of teacher, although there were also pictures of women as nurses and secretaries. The non-working pictures depicted the ideal woman applying make-up, dressing up to go out, or talking with friends. A few girls drew the ideal woman playing ball.

Compared to girls from other countries, a relatively high proportion (33%) drew the ideal woman in the company of others. The other people in the drawings were commonly small children, but sometimes included husbands or friends. On 28% of the drawings the ideal woman was shown helping others. In several cases she demonstrated her honesty by returning lost money; on other drawings she gave advice to small children.

The comments on the drawings revealed a concern with the personal qualities of the ideal woman. Eighteen percent of the girls spontaneously listed personality characteristics of the ideal woman. The most frequently listed quality was trabajadora (hard-working), but girls also described the ideal woman as carinõsa (affectionate, caring), dulce (sweet), honrada (honest), sincera (sincere), or seria (serious). Table 2 presents some examples of comments made on the pictures.

Fewer than 7% of the girls drew the ideal woman with missing body parts. In

scoring children's drawings, missing body parts have been interpreted as a measure of fearfulness (Koppitz, 1984).

The Guatemalan girls who interpreted the representative drawings of the ideal woman cooking, caring for babies, or teaching repeatedly mentioned the importance of hard work, dedication to one's family, and interest in the future. Examples of these comments are presented in Table 3. In general the girls emphasized the positive aspects of working hard in caring for others. They saw the ideal woman as happy, affectionate, competent, and maternal. The teachers were respected for their contributions to society and the future success of their students.

Discussion

The Guatemalan girls in the present study viewed womanhood in traditional terms. The ideal woman works hard, and takes care of her home and family. Her identity is based in her social network, and she derives her happiness and her satisfaction from participating in other's development. If the ideal woman works outside the home, she works in those occupations traditionally reserved for women: teacher, nurse, or secretary.

Maynard (1974) has emphasized the centrality of the Guatemalan woman in family life. She has pointed out that the culture recognizes the contributions of women in the family, and that women's power, in part, derives from the cultural importance of the family (Hawkins, 1984). In the present study Guatemalan girls recognized the value of women as homemakers and caretakers. Few showed signs of dissatisfaction, such as comments that housework is boring.

Nevertheless, adolescence is a period of idealism, and despite the experiences of Guatemalan girls in practicing adult female roles, their adult lives may not be congruent with their idealistic expectations. It is possible that more adult women would view housework as boring.

Despite the tumultuous political and social events occuring in Guatemala during the period of study (Carmack, 1988), girls showed few signs of stress in their drawings. Almost all of the drawings depicted whole persons, in peaceful activities. There were no drawings of violence nor anger. One possible explanation is that the cultural value of collectivism, as well as the immediate social support that the girls receive from parents and caretakers buffers the girls from the effects of social and political events. Lykes (1989) in reviewing the effects of war and political repression on children, suggested that the ill effects can be ameliorated by parents, caretakers, and educational institutions.

Consistent with the collectivist orientation described by Hofstede (1983), the girls in the present study demonstrated social concern, not only for their immediate families, but also for the poor and for the future of their country. They were optimistic and patriotic, professing belief in progress through education. These qualities are exemplified by two quotes from girls describing the drawings of teachers. A thirteen year old girl from Antigua interpreted the teacher in the drawing as wanting to, "teach more Guatemalan people how to read and write and teach them our culture and traditions, and not to forget our origin". Another said, "[The teachers] want the children to be successful."

In summary, the cultural value of collectivism in Guatemala, the traditional emphasis on the family, and the adoption of the feminine values of nurturance and caretaking all contribute to the Guatemalan adolescent girls' view of the ideal woman as hard working, nurturant, honest, and affectionate in her participation in her family and occupational roles.

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Table 1. Mean importance ratings for ten qualities of the ideal woman.

es buena y honrada (kind and honest)	6.4
le gustan los ñinos (likes children)	6.3
es muy inteligente (is very intelligent)	5.8
tiene un buen trabajo (has a good job)	5.6
es divertida (is fun)	5.4
es de estatura y peso común (is of average height and weight)	4.7
es guapa (is good looking)	4.7
es popular (is popular)	4.1
es "sexy" (is sexy)	3.9
tiene mucho dinero (has a lot of money)	3.3

Figure 1. Examples of drawings of the ideal woman sweeping, cooking, holding a baby, and teaching.

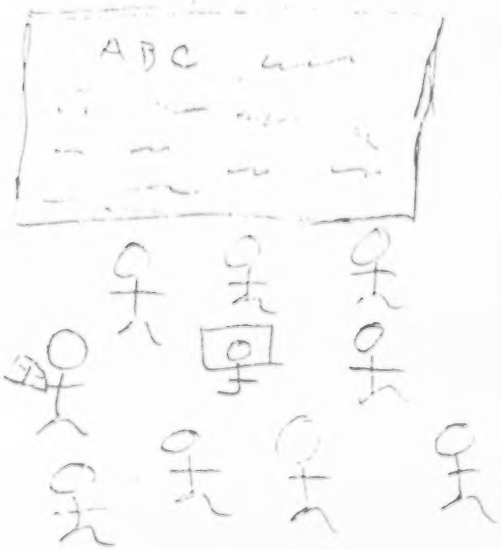

Table 2. Examples of comments on drawings of the ideal woman.

"La mujer ideal deberá pensar siempre y constantemente sobre su familia y su hogar. Que todo este preparado para cuando los niños y el esposo lleguen. Además deberá estar apoyando a su esposo en lo bueno y en lo malo, y no deberá ser bella ni muy inteligente, ni que tenga dinero o sexy o un buen trabajo"
[The ideal woman ought to think always and constantly about her family and her home. That all is ready when the children and her husband arrive home. Moreover she ought to support her husband through the good and the bad, and should not be beautiful nor very intelligent, nor have money, or sexy, or a good job].
(included picture of the ideal woman thinking of a woman in front of a stove, a woman sweeping, a women with children, and a couple).

"Esta pensando en su familia ya que su familia es primero que todo"
[She is thinking of her family because her family comes first.]

"Pienso que la mujer ideal le deberan gustar los niños para poder ser una buena mujer."
[I think that the ideal women ought to like children to be a good woman].

"La mujer ideal deve ser cariñosa y trabajadora deve ser dulce"
[The ideal woman ought to be affectionate and hard-working she should be sweet.]

"Esa es una mujer cariñosa que hana la naturaliza y a sus hijos- ella ana estar en campañia familiar le gusta ser femenina y cariñosa posiblemente sea gorda pero no tiene que ver"
[She is an affectionate woman who loves nature and her children- she loves to be in the company of her family and likes to be feminine and affectionate she is possibly fat but that has nothing to do with it]

"Es una señora dandole dinero a un niño huerfano. tambien le esta dando el pan que traia ella"
[It's a señora giving money to an orphaned child. Also she is giving the bread that she had with her.]

"Ella piensa sobre su futuro"
[She is thinking about her future].

Table 3. Interpretations of drawings of the ideal woman cooking, holding babies, or teaching.

Cooking (concinando)

"Pues que ellos piensan que es la obligacion de la mujer"
[They think that this is a woman's duty]

"Trabajadoras y que ellas pueden concinar cualquier cosa"
[hardworker and they can cook anything]

"Bueno pues le gusta trabajar y no araganear"
[She likes working and not to waste time]

Caring for their babies (cuidando a sus bebés)

"Que quieran a sus hijos "
[That they love their children]

"alegres"
[happy]

"un futuro mejor al que estamos viviendo"
[a better future than the one we are living now]

Teaching (enseñando)

"Buenas porque quieren a los niños"
[They are good people because they love children]

"Sus ideas posiblemente eran de superarse...ya que le disgustan la gente ignorate ya que esta es la que aparenta demaciadas cosas."
[Their ideas were probably about improving themselves... they dislike ignorant people because they pretend too many things.]